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**MEDIA ALERT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Guard called in to aid in Four Mile Fire**

RAPID CITY, S.D. – With two hours to brief, and prepare their aircrafts the South Dakota National Guard's C Company 1-189th, along with State and Federal Firefighters battled a fast moving wildfire, in Custer State Park, Monday evening and into the week that forced officials to close part of the popular Wildlife Loop Road and evacuate the French Creek Horse Camp.

“We got the call Monday afternoon from Military Support Civil Authority (MSCA), then received our Resource Order from State Wildland Fire, and began preparing our aircrafts in order to support the ground crews,” said Capt. Jon Murphy, aircraft flight instructor and crew member.

The blaze named the Four Mile Fire, has burned about 500 acres of land six miles southeast of Blue Bell Lodge by Monday evening. The fires rapid movement forced park officials to close much of the Wildlife Loop Road and being evacuating the camp.

An observer from the Mount Coolidge Fire Look out Tower reported the fire about 1:30 p.m. Officials had not determined the cause of the fire Monday evening, but have since determined indication of a set fire.

“We sent out one crew Monday night, and then two more crews Tuesday and Wednesday,” said Murphy. “Originally dipping Blackhawk's out of Legion Lake in Custer State Park, we then turned to Heliwell, which is well to dip out of that contains water mixed with a gel retardant.”

Air crew included Capt. Jon Murphy, Sgt. Nick Hemen, Sgt. Tony Oerlline, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Wayne Walker, Staff Sgt. Larry Eisenbraun, and Master Sgt. George Hall.

Equipment used by the South Dakota National Guard included three Blackhawk's and Bambi Buckets. The Northern Great Plains Type 2 team was sent to fight the blaze. Resources on the fire include a single-engine air tanker, three dozers, 10 type six engines and four crews. Two more crews were ordered, along with a heavy air tanker, to fight the blaze.

State wildland fire coordinator Joe Lowe said “evidence at the site” on Four Mile Draw Road, where the fire originated, indicated a set fire. The state Division of Criminal Investigation and the Custer County Sheriff’s Department are investigating.

According to an update by an interagency fire-information center, witnesses saw some torching with a large black plume of black smoke. Because of the torching, fire spotting was reported about 300 yards from the main body of the fire.

The interagency update warned that fire danger is high throughout the entire Black Hills area with very high to extreme fire danger is the prairie areas. All fine dead fuels ignite readily, fires start easily from most causes, and unattended brush and campfires are likely to escape, the update said. Fires spread rapidly under such conditions, and short distance spotting is common.